



Prairie Notes

Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

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Suicide in North Dakota

“Suicide is not chosen; it happens when pain exceeds resources for coping with pain.”
-David L. Conroy, Ph.D.

North Dakota is a land steeped in tradition with a rich history and proud heritage. A strong work ethic and independence promote the attitude of “we can take care of ourselves.”

From 1994 through 2003, 797 individuals committed suicide. This averages to about 80 individuals per year or almost 7 each month.

Between 1994 and 2002, the suicide rate in North Dakota was higher than the national average for 8 of the 9 years.

National Information

- Suicide claims approximately 30,000 lives each year in the United States.
- Overall, suicide was the 11th leading cause of death among Americans in 2000.
- In 2003, suicide was the 4th leading cause of death among persons age 10-64 years and the 2nd and 3rd leading causes of death among persons age 10-24 and 25-34 years, respectively.
- The rate of suicide is highest among older men, compared with all other age groups.
- The rate of suicide for males is 4 times higher than the rate of suicide for females.
- The rate of teen suicide for those young people ages 15-19 has tripled since the 1950s.
- As recently as November 2006, test results from suicide victims in 33 states showed that 33.3% had alcohol and 16.4% had opiates in their blood (U.S. Centers for Disease Control).
- In 2004, there were 535,000 visits to emergency rooms nationwide for self-inflicted injuries.

State Information/Data

- Suicide was the 7th leading of cause of death for the years 1997 through 2001.
- Males in North Dakota account for 81% of suicides, while females account for 19%.
- Over the last 10 years, the suicide rate of the male population in North Dakota has averaged more than 5 times higher than that of the female population. Although North Dakota has observed a slight decrease in male suicide rates this decade, the rate still exceeds the national average.
- Female suicide rates have increased steadily over the past 25 years, bringing North Dakota even with the national average.
- There is an upward trend in suicides in the following age groups: 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54.
- The highest average suicide rates for 1994 through 2003 were individuals in the 15-24 and 45-54 age groups.
- Suicide fatalities for the 10-19 age group decreased 47% in 2000-2004.
- In 2004, American Indian teen suicide rates rose dramatically.
- Suicide by firearms is almost three times more prevalent than the next most common method, which is hanging/suffocation.

- Males account for 41% and females 59% of all suicide attempts in the state.
- The *2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey* results for North Dakota high school students reported that 5% of youths in grades 7 and 8 and 6% of youths in grades 9-12 attempted suicide. The 15 reported suicides of youth ages 10-19 in 2005 were all male.
- Every year, an average of 382 people in North Dakota are hospitalized because of suicide attempts. The average medical cost per case of suicide attempt is \$7,516.
- 15-19 year olds account for 32% of the suicide attempts leading to the highest hospitalization rate.

Implications

In the 2005 North Dakota Suicide Prevention Plan, the Suicide Prevention Task Force identifies a number of factors that could affect the implementation of the plan:

Recognizing barriers to service:

- Much of the state's population is geographically isolated.
 - Availability and accessibility to mental health services is limited.
 - Communication and transportation services are lacking in some areas.
- A shortage of trained mental health professionals.
- A general lack of awareness and understanding of the problem.

Alcohol and substance abuse can influence suicide rates.

- ND ranks very high in alcohol and substance abuse, particularly binge drinking.
- Youth in ND continue to lead the nation in underage drinking (*2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey*).

Due to the extent of the problem in North Dakota, previous prevention efforts have not been sufficient to effect notable change in the rates of suicide.

Department/Community Response

The North Dakota Suicide Prevention Task Force developed a prevention plan to reduce the number of suicides. The Mental Health Association in North Dakota and the North Dakota Department of Health Injury Prevention Program were the lead agencies for the plan and directed the task force.

The North Dakota Suicide Prevention Task Force was reorganized into the North Dakota Suicide Prevention Coalition. The work will continue in coordination with the Suicide Prevention Program within the Division of Injury Prevention and Control in the North Dakota Department of Health.

The Department of Human Services Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services is a member of the North Dakota Suicide Prevention Coalition.

The Department of Human Services recognizes the need to continue to enhance services, provide information and training, and collaborate with other agencies to reduce the number of fatalities due to suicide.

- A work plan for suicide prevention will be developed by April 2007.
- National and state data, as well as information on prevention efforts, will continue to be shared with the eight regional human service centers on a regular basis.
- The Division will receive technical assistance to support the efforts it is making to transform the public mental health system. The technical assistance will address the Department's workforce retention and recruitment efforts.

Links/Outside Resources

National Institute of Mental Health <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

National Center for Health Statistics <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/suicide.htm>

North Dakota Kids Count <http://www.ndkidscount.org/health/deathdata.htm>

Youth Risk Behavior Surveys <http://dpi.state.nd.gov/health/YRBS/index.shtm>

North Dakota Kids Count 2006 Publication, “Focus on American Indian Children”
www.ndkidscount.org

North Dakota Department of Health Injury Prevention and Control
<http://www.ndhealth.gov/injury/>

Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) http://www.sprc.org/about_sprc/index.asp

The President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, Final Report 2003
<http://www.mentalhealthcommission.org>

North Dakota Suicide Prevention Plan 2005
[http://www.ndhealth.gov/injury/Publications/Suicide Prevention Plan.pdf](http://www.ndhealth.gov/injury/Publications/Suicide%20Prevention%20Plan.pdf)

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/suicide-overview.htm>

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“Our mission is to provide quality, efficient and effective human services, which improve the lives of people.”

Division of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services 1237 West Divide Avenue, Suite 1C Bismarck, ND 58501
Phone: 701-328-8920 Fax 701-328-8969 TTY: 701-328-8968 E-mail: dhsmsas@nd.gov